

# Venus envy 2

## Sisterhood, queen bees and female misogyny in management

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Using an alternative lens to challenge assumptions of solidarity behaviour and the queen bee label, the paper aims to analyse empirical data to explore negative relations between women in management and surface processes of female misogyny.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Feminist standpoint epistemology; qualitative semi-structured interviews; subjective narrative data from senior women and women academics of management in two UK organisations.

**Findings** – Assumptions of solidarity behaviour are largely absent in the research and the queen bee label impacts pejoratively on women in management, perpetuating a “blame the woman” perspective. Senior women do recognise barriers facing women in management but they do not want to lead on the “women in management mantle.” This does not make them queen bees; the women recognise becoming “male” in order to “fit” senior management and acknowledge the impact of their gendered context. From this context, processes of female misogyny between women in management fragment notions of solidarity; highlight contradictory places women take in relation to other women and challenge women as “natural allies.”

**Research limitations/implications** – Future research should engage women at all levels in management in consciousness-raising to the impact women have on other women. Organizational interventions are required to explicitly surface how the gender order exacerbates differences between them to maintain the gendered status quo.

**Originality/value** – Empirical paper using an alternative lens to problematize solidarity behaviour and queen bee, surfaces female misogyny between women in management and highlights how the gendered social order encourages and exacerbate differences between women.

**Keywords** Women executives, Sexual discrimination, Gender

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

In the first Venus Envy paper I argued that much of the research exploring the advancement of women in management is, in general, based on principles and assumptions of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour (Mavin, 2006). I raised tensions concerning the way women perceive senior women in management and the expectations they hold of them, demonstrated by the contradictions of solidarity behaviours versus queen bee behaviours (Staines *et al.*, 1973, Abramson, 1975) and argued that there is a gender complexity to life as a senior woman in management which is ignored in some current approaches. In particular the paper highlighted how the incongruity between managerial and gender roles impacted upon how women in senior management view, and are viewed by other women in the organisation. By highlighting these tensions and contradictions and raising processes of female

misogyny between women in management, I offered an alternative theoretical lens to investigate the experiences of women in management.

This current paper draws upon these debates and offers empirical research to explore how less positive relations between women, question assumptions of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour and the value of the queen bee label to women in management research. Through an alternative lens I interpret narratives from senior women and academics in the UK to raise the complexity of processes of female misogyny between women and to challenge the expectation that women in senior management should exhibit solidarity behaviours and lead on the woman in management mantle.

## **Theoretical debates revisited**

### *Solidarity behaviour*

Kanter (1977) described activities which are now the basis of solidarity behaviour between women in organisation, noting that minority members of organization can become allies, form coalitions, affect the cultures of the group and develop support networks that enhance the chances of women's career advancement. Recently Korabik and Abbondanza (2004) described solidarity behaviour between women as bringing together processes of forming alliances, collaborating, joining together with shared aims, a commitment to changing social structures for women at the collective not just the individual level and behaviours which demonstrate loyalty and gender awareness in managerial practice. They argue that solidarity behaviour is enacted by women acting as instruments of social change and therefore place the emphasis of change upon individual women (Korabik and Abbondanza, 2004).

An assumption of solidarity behaviour contends that women will support and align themselves with other women. This is implicit within research studies which seek to explain the experiences and position of women in management, recommending that women should have proactive, visible and high profile senior women as role models and mentors and for the development of women's networks as a primary means of encouraging women in management. Senior women are often recommended to support, develop and to work to raise the profile of other women. However, such research has, in general, ignored and therefore perpetuated a "cover up" of negative relations between women in management.

Many researchers, including my own previous work, have looked to those women in senior positions, either recommending that senior women do more to help other women (Bryans and Mavin, 2003; Mavin and Bryans, 2002; McKeen and Burke, 1994; Singh *et al.*, 2000; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2003) or blaming them for becoming honorary men (Gini, 2001), or both.

### *Women in management are not natural allies. . .*

Legge's (1987) position is that women fail to exploit their potential power in organisations resulting in women failing to build alliances with their natural allies: other women. But do women view other women as their natural allies in management? "Do women dislike each other, as is often said – or is there a hidden taboo on important alliances between women, one that keeps them 'competitive'?" (Hite, 2005, p. 1).

Hite (2005) questions women's relationships with other women in organization and notes that in meetings or work situations, sometimes women fear siding with other



women, "against the men" calling it modern not to automatically agree with another woman, though men often agree and work in groups with other men with no self-consciousness. Hite (2005, p. 2) challenges women's inability to be natural allies and asks:

... men also have mixed feelings and don't see "all other men" as equals, but they form successful alliances, corporate boards and sports teams. In fact, men are encouraged by all kinds of unspoken social signals to work together, to do business, conduct government etc ... why do men create loyalty systems that work whereas women do not?

Hite's question can be explored by taking a gender-organization system approach where "individual women cannot be understood separately from the society, culture or the context in which she works" (Fagenson, 1993, p. 6).

In terms of sites of senior management, Liff and Ward (2001, p. 20) note:

... organizations are also the site within which women come to understand the requirements of senior jobs and their own career options'. Significantly, organizations implicitly, extensively and consistently favour the masculine worldview (Cheng, 1996); men's worldviews mesh neatly with the social order of organization, whereas those of women tend to clash with it (Maier, 1999, p. 89).

The nature of senior management for women and the behaviours and actions required to gain entry and remain within this environment do little to sustain notions of sisterhood or solidarity behaviour.

There is evidence that women find it particularly difficult to relate to women in senior management and their reactions to senior women (and vice versa) perpetuate divisions between them. Coates (1998) argues that women have to suppress femininity to join the "corporate crusade." While O'Leary and Ryan (1994) note that women in senior management are role-deviant and when women encounter women at work, their normative expectations of one another illustrate sex-role spill over at its worst. Indeed, there is incongruity between the managerial role and senior women's gender role in terms of self-concept, as if women are feminine and conform to their gender role then they fail to meet the prerequisites of the masculine managerial role but if they display masculine managerial behaviour they fail to meet the female gender role (Powell and Butterfield, 2003). In particular the assumption of women as natural allies is particularly challenged once a woman destabilizes the established gendered order by moving into senior management.

Women cannot win and they face the contradictory demands of being feminine and business like (Wacjman, 1998, pp. 7-8). They cannot join as a woman and once they start to behave like a man, they cannot be a "proper woman" (Maddock, 1999).

If you are a senior woman and your peer group are senior men then it is difficult not to develop behaviours and style congruent with "fitting in" (Bryans and Mavin, 2003) and acceptance. While women in senior management may face many of the same barriers as those who are still moving up the ranks (Hamlin, 1994), they also face the isolation of moving away from the majority of women in management who are found at supervisory and middle levels. There is not much room at the top for women and successful women are not so much representatives of, as exiles from, their sex (Wacjman, 1998). Far from being sisters, therefore senior women are isolated from other women.

### *Questioning the "queen bee" concept and the "women in management mantle"*

Assumptions of solidarity behaviour also underpin those studies proposing that women in senior management have not paved the way for other women. Such research perpetuates the incongruity between the managerial and the gender role, without acknowledging the gendered context in which senior women work. For example, Gini (2001) argues that women are not very nice and this is why we do not like them. . . "Having achieved success by playing hardball and working hard, they expect the same from others," (Gini, 2001, p. 99). These arguments present senior women as more "male than men" for "pulling up the ladder" or the "drawbridge" for other women once they have reached senior levels, therefore creating further barriers to keep women in their place in management. If, as a senior woman, you do not lead on the women in management mantle; if you do not conform to a feminine model and you develop commonalities with your peer group, who will be mostly men, then you will be vilified for not representing the interests of women and for becoming more male than the men: another no-win situation for women in management.

Whilst there is a wealth of research which considers the gendered nature of senior management and other levels in management, there is a contradiction between senior management as a gendered place and the expectations of senior women in promoting and progressing women in management issues. Solidarity behaviour sets expectations of senior women which cannot be fulfilled and perpetuates the continued unhelpful labelling of senior women as queen bees (Staines *et al.*, 1973, Abramson, 1975).

Staines *et al.* (1973) offered "queen bee syndrome" to describe women who were actively opposed to any changes in traditional sex roles. Abramson (1975) used "queen bee" to describe women in senior management who denied that there was systematic discrimination against women and argued that fewer still were willing to do anything about it, so that queen bees would not accept that women who are capable of a management career are unable to progress due to discrimination.

The label queen bee has recently made a comeback particularly in the popular press and media, often used to communicate the "bad behaviour" from senior women to other women in organisation. The label is used at times when women are perceived as "not supporting" other women but at others the label is attached to women who have simply moved into a senior role. Continued unproblematised use of queen bee to describe individual senior women presents another "blame or fix" the woman position; it deflects constructive analysis of senior management in gendered organization and ignores the complex gendered processes which socially construct the experiences and identities of senior women. Perpetuation of the queen bee concept may be part of a wider discourse of keeping women in second place in management (Mavin, 2001a) and of continuing the divide between women in management and senior management.

Expectations of solidarity from senior women are perpetuated and the assumption that these women should be representatives of, and responsible for, the progression of women in management remains unquestioned.

Another assumption fundamental to solidarity behaviour is that senior women should and do view the "women in management" mantle as their responsibility. However, Mattis (1993) found that women Directors want to be recognised for their talents and abilities, not as representatives of the interests of women. Rindfleish (2000) in her study of women in senior management found that women do not want the responsibility for leading on the advancement of women in management and whilst

they acknowledge barriers to women's progress in management they disagree as to the nature of the barriers, what their responsibility is to change them and are not keen to be responsible for removing them.

Olssen and Pringle (2004) note that their women Executives achieved senior status, in part because they had dismissed barriers and had celebrated their power within the senior context, but again like Rindfleish's (2000) study the women did little to change the context. Olssen and Pringle (2004, p. 38) comment:

... it is somewhat unsurprising that, as extremely successful women ... they endorsed dominant discourses .... Neither [public or private] sector acknowledged the presence of a glass ceiling in their own careers, and barriers were things to be circumvented or destroyed. Their focus was on openings and opportunities.

The question posed here is whether individual women in these studies should be labelled as queen bees? The senior women did not view the women in management mantle as their responsibility and why would they? It is naïve to hope that once women have made their way to the top then they will then change the rules and:

... after internalising and acting on the rules of bureaucratic discourse for most of their adult lives how many women (or men) will be able to change ... after succeeding in the system by using these rules, how many would be willing to change them? (Ferguson, 1984, p. 192).

#### *Negative relations between women: female misogyny?*

Previous research has explored women in management by analysing gendered relations between men and women. However, there is limited research exploring negative relations between women in organization (Abramson, 1975; Goldberg, 1968; Legge, 1987; Nicholson, 1996; Staines *et al.*, 1973) and there are few studies which concentrate on the differences between women in management or the propensity for women managers to assist other women in their aspirations to senior management (Rindfleish, 2000). An explanation for this is that it is very difficult to do so without falling into yet another "blame the women" standpoint.

Established gender systems embedded in organization and historical assumptions of "management as male" (Schein and Davidson, 1993), socially construct and impact upon women's behaviour towards women in senior management. Just as embedded organizational gender systems constructs and sometimes results in misogynistic attitudes and behaviours of men towards women, then these gender systems can also be viewed as a framework to explore relations between women.

For example, Greer (2000) argues that as women move into a predominantly male world of senior management, they are brought up sharply against prevailing misogynies and will only accept them if they too engage in the process of swallowing the package of which they are a part. When considering this in terms of women's relationships with other women, then women may face prevailing female misogynies, evident when women accept gendered constructions of the female, sometimes unknowingly, as they submit to or accept gendered structures and order.

Wacjman (1998) argues that many women undermine women's authority and notes that women find it difficult to deal with senior women because the strategies they are accustomed to using with men are inappropriate for women. As women have internalised gender hierarchies, it seems almost proper for a man to be in a superior position. In the case of senior men the related power is eroticised and this complex



intertwining of power with sexuality means that senior women who are powerful provoke anxieties and ambivalence in women as well as men (Wacjman, 1998). Resulting from gendered systems and incongruity between gender roles and senior management, Starr (2001, p. 9) provides some examples of negative relations between women:

Competition between women may go deeper than professional rivalry, to include sub-conscious jealousy and competition based on age or appearance (attractiveness, weight, dress sense). This suggests that at times women may read each other's sexed bodies through men's eyes in sexual competition. At other times the perception of separation and competition is explained in work related terms through factors such as intellectual ability, professional connections, reputation, etc. Furthermore, unlike the more open forms of hostility exhibited by men, women observe that competition or opposition from women is more likely to manifest as passive resistance.

Such negative relations between women, grounded in a context of organizational gender systems, can be viewed as "female misogyny".

Negative relations as female misogyny may provide a means of tentatively raising and discussing negative relations between and towards other women in order to make these relations visible, to acknowledge and understand them. Evidence of female misogyny between women in management may be more evident at junctures where women either threaten to, or succeed in, de-stabilizing the established gender order by either displaying ambition towards senior management or by actually succeeding in a move into senior management. Historically embedded organisational gender systems which reinforce a management as male status quo, also construct women's place in management as second place (Mavin, 2001a). As a result, interactions between women, resulting from concern for, and possible threats to established gendered hierarchies, become struggles over destabilization, change and/or maintenance of this gendered status quo. Processes of female misogyny therefore emerge from the complex way in which gender order, underlying assumptions and behaviours are embedded and impact upon everyday experiences for women in management.

By highlighting contradictions in current approaches to women in management research these debates recognize the gender systems which construct management, question assumptions of solidarity behaviour and problematise the queen bee label, offering an alternative lens to interpret women's experiences in management.

### **The research approach**

In order to investigate how women in senior management view their role in relation to the "women in management mantle," solidarity behaviour, issues relating to queen bee and negative relations between women, I draw upon subjective narrative data from two empirical research projects.

Firstly I draw upon research which investigated women's experiences of senior management in the Housing Sector in the UK (Mavin and Lockwood, 2004) and secondly, research exploring academic women's identity and place in a UK Business and Management School, also in the UK (Mavin, 2001b). The narratives were chosen from these particular research projects, not for comparative purposes across sectors but because of consistency in the methodological approach; commitment to prioritising women's voice and because the data resulting from both research projects enabled a rethinking of the concepts of queen bee and solidarity behaviour. My co-researcher and

I were senior women in the researched organizations and when reviewing the theory base relating to queen bee and solidarity behaviour we both experienced reflexive cognisant dissonance in terms of our own experiences as senior women.

Both projects followed a similar methodology underpinned by feminist standpoint principles of women's experience as a basis of research; the researcher as accountable to participants and community; consideration of personal as political and a reflexive perspective (Griffin, 1995). Following a feminist standpoint epistemology aims to explore those shared characteristics of women as a social group, giving attention to experiences and lives of women and "giving voice" and enabling exploration of hidden knowledges and resistances (Willis, 1977). It is not the aim to generalise these knowledges but to analyse the commonalities that women share. In doing so women's experiences can be more fully understood and we can rethink existing approaches and theory.

The interviews specific to this paper were conducted in 1999-2000 and 2003 and changing the names of all participants has ensured anonymity. Through biographical semi-structured interviews we developed individual case studies of women, analysed to produce subjective narrative texts.

Reflexivity involved transcript distribution to participants for further reflective thought and engaging critical friends who shared feminist principles at the interpretation stage of the research. Narrative extracts from eight individual women's case studies, four from each research project, have been included to illustrate how women seek to make sense of their experiences in organization. As a final step, the researchers drew upon conceptual cohesion with reference to the constructs in the literature (Kitchener *et al.*, 2000, p. 219) providing frameworks for analysis.

Narrative is an appropriate interpretative lens for understanding processes of micro-political activity, one means by which ideas and practices are legitimated (Currie and Brown, 2003, p. 564). This is particularly valuable for shedding light on aspects of individual and group sense making; sense making being understood to refer to those processes of interpretation and meaning production whereby people reflect on, interpret phenomena and produce intersubjective accounts (Leiter, 1980 in Currie and Brown (2003)). Etter-Lewis (1991, p. 43) claims that narratives offer a unique and provocative means of gathering information central to understanding women's life viewpoints. Narratives reflect the multiplicity of experiences and multiple social roles that are often acted out simultaneously but are situationally contingent, producing situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991). As part of a reflexive process, the narratives chosen to be included here are part of an authorial strategy and presented to have a particular effect on our readership (Denzin, 1994; Currie and Brown, 2003).

### **Views from senior management: the "alleged" queen bees?**

On first reading, narratives from women at executive director level in the UK Housing Sector, appear to support Gini's (2001) argument that women who have broken through the glass ceiling have done so by outperforming men on their own terms and their responses would historically have fallen within Abramson's (1975) description of a queen bee. However, interpreting the narratives through an alternative lens enables a different reading of senior women's narratives and highlights embedded gendered systems as a context to their experiences, thus mediating and problematising the queen bee concept.



When questioned on their views on the glass ceiling Anne said:

What sort of evidence have they got? Have they applied for one job and not got it? Well that's my point about no matter who you are or what level you've got to be resilient. If you want to get to the top you have to be resilient about getting knocked back, I think it's too easy to blame the glass ceiling.

Louise commented:

Glass ceiling . . . women need to learn there are various ways to crack it . . . they need dogged perseverance and persistence.

The women's perceptions of whether they worked harder than those men in similar executive roles, provides a context to their other responses. Kate explains:

I know I am striving to prove myself all of the time, so yes I have to work harder.

Louise comments:

When I was in my previous job I was definitely doing a better job than the men but I always knew I would have to work harder and perform better just to get accepted - which is grossly unfair. Male mediocre performance is OK, female mediocre performance at that level is not OK, if we are mediocre they are onto our case, if its men they get away with it.

In terms of their management style as senior women, becoming more "male than men" was recognised as an issue. Kate said:

I swear more now than I used to. I guess I have sometimes fallen into that . . . my temper and raising my voice and swearing. I have bitterly regretted it since and its one of the things I have got a problem with, because it doesn't feel natural to me, I really don't like being like that so then I have gone around and apologised to people.

Elaine responded:

You have to behave more like a man though to be accepted, it's not right and it would be nice to be accepted for what you are rather than what they want you to be.

Louise highlighted the problems related to fitting in:

I soon learned that to be accepted I needed to become one of the boys and started swearing and drinking with them. When men cracked sexist jokes, I laughed with them, even though it got right under my skin, I knew to survive I had to play the game . . . their game. I even took up golf . . . I was known as the honorary man. You also have to play to men's rules otherwise they just won't let you in. People are critical when you assume male traits . . . they call you bossy and arrogant, all the negative adjectives, but men who behave this way are seen as strong leaders, etc.

When the women in the UK Housing Sector were asked about their perceptions of gender discrimination facing women in management and their views on their responsibility for challenging and changing this Kate said:

Getting women to the top is not seen as a priority and that's probably because the decisions are largely men's and they don't see it as a priority! I don't think we will be doing anything proactively to recruit women though, whether we spend more opportunity developing the women we have would be interesting. I wouldn't feel right leading on the issue . . . not because I don't believe in it but my priorities lie elsewhere. I don't feel passionately enough about it and I do need to feel passionate about something to lead on something. Having said that



I recognise it though and I think there are things that can be done without necessarily going to the barricades ... I hope that's not a cop out?

Anne said:

I keep coming back to the thing about not being pole axed by rejection and knock backs and I think that's the most significant thing and that's not just confined to women but women do succumb more and it's the self esteem thing and their self esteem is knocked and we don't try again.

Louise commented:

There are not enough women in positions of influence, that's why nothing has changed ... men don't like women at the top, they prefer them to be submissive. We at the top have to influence and change things - alter the male resistance ... women have a responsibility to give women more opportunities ... its about discreet discrimination - its not on not to help women - its not a level playing field and women need a leg up.

Elaine responded:

I think the only way it would be changed is if women were more assertive about it and I don't think we are and I don't think we fight our corner very well. I think as a group we should raise our profile as men won't do it for us. If I was asked to take responsibility for leading gender change within the current management team I would be anxious ... quite anxious ... one woman out of three.

Throughout the interview process the women identified experiences where they were faced with majority male audiences, feeling uncomfortable, exclusion, inadequacy and having to psyche themselves up for occasions, but they were reluctant to ascribe this to any form of gendered experience. They preferred to blame themselves in terms of inadequacy or low self-esteem and identified women's lack of confidence, including their own, as an issue for women in management. They admired male confidence, not competence, and men's self-belief in their own ability. Like Rindfleish's (2000) study, the women described barriers they had faced to varying degrees, and without exception thought the current lack of women at the top to be unacceptable and disappointing but inevitable. Only one thought women at the top have a responsibility to help other women while others thought women had to help themselves by being more confident and persistent and were reluctant to offer women a "leg up".

Unlike Rindfleish's (2000) study, the women were not inclined to engage in solidarity behaviours; they wanted to be recognised for their talents, abilities and knowledge and not as representatives of women. None of the women were prepared to lead on gender issues or to be seen to be visibly supporting women in management. These narratives highlight the difficult "fitting in" processes of joining senior management and the impact of this on the expectation of solidarity behaviour or sisterhood in relation to other women in management.

In different research this would have labelled these women queen bees however interpreting the narratives through an alternative lens allows the impact of the context in which they are operating to be acknowledged. The women's narratives highlight how "doing senior management" is grounded in "doing gender" (Gherardi, 1995) and demonstrate that the "women in management mantle" is not a one-woman responsibility. These senior women do recognise the issue of becoming more male

than men to achieve and to survive in senior management but they are reluctant to take on the women in management mantle; this is a central dilemma.

### **Women academics and processes of female misogyny**

Narratives from with academic women at principal lecturer grade and below exploring women's place and identity highlight how processes of female misogyny between women manifest within a UK business and management higher education organisation. The following analysis centres on Martha, who emerged as a predominant character in the women's narratives. Martha was described as "the only legend" in the organization, which was the most complimentary description or as a woman who was "too sexy for her own good".

Resulting from her overt sexuality, Martha was perceived by the academic women as having done "a lot of damage" to how women in the organization were viewed. There was a lack of sisterhood or solidarity behaviour when "Martha stories" were told, rather through the narratives, processes of female misogyny emerge.

During the interviews when asked to talk about the heroes, heroines and villains in the organization Barbara commented:

There is one female legend, Woman O. Everybody I met brought her into conversations, talking about the impact she had on the organization. She was too feminine for her own good and people did not know how to handle her and there was some jealousy. Both men and women brought her into the conversation. She is a legend because she networked and used power and influence that was the legend. I heard a lot of stories, people burned to talk about her so she left a kind of mark. To the people this was negative.

When asked what were the important stories in the organization Tania answered:

X stories, I was able to ridicule her. She used to wear short skirts, skimpy things, short and obscene but the day after she had her interview when she didn't get the job she came into the tea room, and said "what the fuck do you have to do to get on in this place?" Stories about her sitting with her legs crossed in a mini skirt on the desk in front of students, she had said doesn't it make you feel good when all your students fancy you. I used to think what a silly cow who does she think she is, she used to do the rounds - she targeted people who were influential and she probably meant "who the fuck".

Sonia replied:

She didn't help the acceptance of women in the organization. She put women back a few years and as she was so prolific and up front they didn't realise that there were serious implications for women. I think she was dangerous and she wasn't popular.

While Vicky said:

All the men in the organization were sucked into it. She was a plausible character, she could make everyone think she could do her job well, you could see her coming a mile off, sitting at the desk with her legs wide open. She got a male student to write her testimonial for her but they didn't renew her contract.

As a woman Martha challenged the dominant gendered culture in ways that had not been evident before, by using her sexuality explicitly and destabilizing the gendered order. In doing so she emerged as the organisation's "executive tart," she could not be easily understood in terms of the existing constructions of woman or gendered structures and therefore she could not be easily "managed". In terms of the women's



stories about her, these are interpreted as a manifestation of female misogyny, demonstrating women's prejudice and antagonism towards other women. Martha destabilised the established gender order within the organisation and was rejected by both men and women; left without a place in the organisation.

The narratives evidence the arguments of Starr (2001) and Wacjman (1998) that women and their sexuality destabilise gender stereotypes and gender structures regardless of hierarchical level. When this happens it is clear that it is not sisterhood and solidarity behaviours but processes of female misogyny which come to the fore. Martha was not a senior woman but was attempting to gain a full time post in a way which challenged the other women's perceptions of their recognised gender order. Their response is interpreted as evidence of female misogyny, highlighting a lack of solidarity behaviour between women.

Processes of female misogyny are also evident in the women's perceptions of senior women within the organization. In comparison to their discussions of Martha, the academic women expected solidarity behaviour from senior women and were disappointed when this was not evident. The women viewed the senior women as "honorary men" with masculine behaviours and traits and their narratives revealed feelings of being "let down".

The token senior women were perceived as not being there to sponsor or mentor other women; they were not arguing their cause and had become in some instances, more male than the men (Mavin, 2001b). Through their narratives the women demonstrated disappointment with the senior women in that they perceived a lack of sisterhood or solidarity behaviour, from the top down. Holding this view, the token women should have changed the culture and fought their battles for them, retaining their identity as women. For example, Tania talked about what helped and hindered women in the culture and when referring to the two women heads of department said:

I don't think we have anybody in position who is prepared to sponsor women ... I have no respect for AB's [a woman Head of Department] models of management and CD [a woman Principal Lecturer] has now abandoned the people she canvassed to get promoted and I can't do that, its not the way I work.

When discussing management behaviours, Samantha said:

You can begin to believe that she [a woman Head of Department] and potentially EF [a woman Principal Lecturer] demonstrate male confidence and self promotion. A perfect example was when EF, when the new Head of Personnel was announced, went straight to external relations to tell them about her relationship with them and she has gone straight to the VC on other occasions even though I told her the information in the first place, she bypassed me and went straight to the top.

Sandra also comments:

Currently I would say two of the three senior women have developed their masculine sides, their traits are masculine and they have developed this. AB's [a woman Head of Department] behaviours are masculine until she remembers she's a woman and she giggles, but in meetings she wants to show that she is top dog and is masculine in her approach. HI [a woman Principal Lecturer] has developed a man's model of management – she is very direct, doesn't have time for any niceties and does have time to make time as she has her own agenda and sticks to it.

The behaviours of senior women were perceived as male and reinforced the women's ideas of what types of identities are needed when you move into senior management, legitimising why they did not want to move into this place.

Here processes of female misogyny succeed in disassociating women in senior management from other women and perpetuate the gendered order by socially constructing senior management for women. In this research senior management becomes a "bad place" evidenced not least by the perceived male behaviour and management style required and the superwoman status needed to sustain it, but also because as a woman you become a man and you will be undermined by and face antagonism from, women as well as men.

## Discussion

Assumptions underpinning solidarity behaviour are problematic for both senior women and other women in management. The research with senior women in the UK Housing Sector supports Rindfleisch's (2000) study, in that the senior women recognise the barriers facing women in management but they do not feel comfortable in taking responsibility for the women in management mantle. The narratives demonstrate that these senior women recognise that they take on male behaviours in order to fit into senior management and they do acknowledge the impact of their gendered context. Significantly, however, by viewing the narratives through an alternative lens, this does not construct the women as queen bees. Championing women's issues by leading on the "women in management mantle" is not a mainstream strategic role valued by organisations, and until it is, why have this expectation of senior women? Men and women pejoratively label any woman who does so as the "token feminist" which further undermines the value of women's roles and managerial identities. Simply the threat of being labelled as such leaves senior women feeling uneasy.

The contradictions between and assumptions of, solidarity behaviour and the queen bee label should be revisited to explicitly acknowledge the gendered contexts of senior management for women; to enable our unrealistic expectations of senior women to be readjusted; to prevent perpetuation of a "blame the women" perspective and to recognize that the queen bee label is now outdated and undermines women in management.

The narratives of academic women in management highlight negative relations between women. Reactions to Martha as a woman who wanted to join the organisation full time but who was perceived as using her sexuality too overtly, demonstrate that processes of female misogyny undermine assumptions of solidarity behaviour across organisational hierarchies. The same women were then seen to engage in processes of female misogyny upwards towards senior women for not retaining their femininity and for not taking on the women in management mantle. Expectations of solidarity behaviour from women do not hold across organisational boundaries, up, down and across hierarchical structures.

When women experience female misogyny it is worse somehow than misogyny, as we are put in our place by women who disassociate themselves from us, because as women we are in or aspire to senior positions (Mavin, 2001b):

Women express both surprise and disappointment at having to contend with opposition from women as well as men in their roles. It is a statement about women's learnt devaluation of the whole category of "woman" (Starr, 2001, p. 10).



Not only are women in senior management in competition with men and women, but they also have to face antagonism or similar from men and women in the organization. Specifically from those women who feel uncomfortable that senior women have destabilised the established gendered order by moving place, becoming more “male than the men” and by not using their senior management position to fight the way for other women.

Processes of female misogyny fragment notions of sisterhood and solidarity. Different manifestations of female misogyny highlight the contradictory places women take in relation to other women and raise questions about women as “natural allies” and of the notion of solidarity behaviour as an advancement strategy for women in management. However, it is important to note that these debates are not intended as yet another “blame the women” position. Processes of female misogyny emerge from the complex way in which gender order is embedded, socially constructing everyday experiences for women in management.

Future women in management research which engages women in senior and other levels in management in consciousness-raising to the context in which they are operating and the impact women have on other women is a way forward and as such presents a unique challenge to advancing women in management. Enabling such consciousness-raising and transparency between women in management through future research is crucial to enable challenge to established gender order. In order to change the experiences of women in management, rather than masking or ignoring the tensions and complexity embedded in different perspectives, experiences of and relationships between women, these should be openly and transparently investigated in future women in management research.

Organisational interventions are also required to engage in practical consciousness-raising with women at different levels in management in order to highlight explicitly how the gender order exacerbates differences between them in order to maintain the gendered status quo. Interventions with women from various levels of management which surface the contradictions between solidarity behaviour, queen bee and the gendered nature of management, would constrain the power of gendered discourses which keep women in their place.

This type of practical action may provide space to engage in difficult discussions about the negative as well as positive relations between women in management. Future research is then important to establish whether this type of action can challenge the current place of women in management whilst at the same time constructing a different future for women in senior management.

As a result of these debates covered here evidence why we should refocus future research concerning women in management. Rather than recommending more senior women in mentoring and role models, while at the same time “blaming” them for being more male than men, there is a need to focus future action on challenging and changing the overall gendered structures and systems in place affecting all women in organization. Future research investigating gendered systems, gender cultures and how we now “do and perform” gender in management would be valuable in order to establish how far, if at all, organizations have progressed. Research which recognises organizational gender systems moves us in the direction of uncovering taken-for-granted gendered assumptions, raising issues of context and meaning and bringing to the surface underlying values (Smircich, 1993), in order to challenge the

status quo of management. Such research would also relocate the position of women in management at an organisational rather than an individual "blame" level.

The alternative is to maintain the status quo for women in management by continuing with a veneer or pretence of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour, and continuing to ignore the impact of gender systems on senior women by labelling them queen bees, whilst as women we continue to "fight amongst ourselves".

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